

Resurrection: Faith or Fact? Miracle Not Required?

Peter S. Williams

Assistant Professor in Communication and Worldviews
NLA University College, Norway
peterswilliams@googlemail.com

I was privileged to have the opportunity to contribute two chapters to *Resurrection: Faith or Fact?* (Pitchstone, 2019). One of these chapters reviewed the written resurrection debate therein between atheist Carl Stecher (Professor Emeritus of English at Salem State University) and Christian Craig L. Blomberg (Distinguished Professor of the New Testament at Denver Seminary in Colorado).¹ While I had a couple of critical comments relating to Professor Blomberg's chapters, I focused my attention on Professor Stecher's contribution to the debate, grouping my observations under the headings listed in the title of my review chapter: 'Evidence, Explanation and Expectation' ('EEE'). In his closing essay, 'Miracle Not Required', Carl responded to 'EEE'. Here, I critique 'Miracle Not Required', using the same categories used in 'EEE'.

Evidence – Part One: Historical Methodology

Professor Stecher (to whom I will refer as 'Carl') opens his debate with Professor Blomberg (to whom I will refer as 'Craig') by asserting that 'What is lacking is any method for differentiating the historical from the legendary and fictional,² genres he assumes are mixed together in the New Testament (NT). In 'EEE' I note that if Carl lacks a method for differentiating between historical and non-historical

material, he cannot justify his assertion that the Gospels contain both types of material (for example, Carl holds that the crucifixion is historical but the empty tomb isn't). Contra Carl, I maintain that the historical 'criteria of authenticity'³ provide us with principled ways of 'determining what [in the resurrection narratives] is actually historical.'⁴

In 'Miracle Not Required', Carl makes an apparent *mea culpa* that quickly turns into a *red herring*:

Peter's challenge is justified; at the very least my point needs clarification. My statement reflects a position of skepticism and the rejection of Christian biblical literalism and infallibility . . . This is, after all, a pivotal issue in any consideration of the historicity of the New Testament accounts of Jesus' resurrection.⁵

However, my point was that Carl's skepticism isn't methodologically principled, and this response simply avoids the issue at hand.

Moreover, by using the criteria of historicity, one can argue for *specific* points of historical veracity within the NT, and even for the *general* historical reliability of the NT, without appealing to any notion of biblical 'infallibility' (or inerrancy).⁶

I wonder whether Carl is at least *gesturing* towards an argument here, to the

effect that there exists a warranted connection between belief in Jesus' resurrection and belief in the 'infallibility' of the NT, such that evidence against the latter is thereby evidence against the former. This elaboration of Carl's mention of infallibility would be of a piece with his indirect arguments, which I will examine later, about the accessibility of salvation and the problem of evil. *If* Carl has such an argument in mind, *then* he's relying upon several additional assumptions: that 'infallibility' is inconsistent with a specific type of textual data, that there's warrant for believing that this specific type of data exists within the NT, and that this warrant is stronger than the warrant for belief in the resurrection. Since Carl doesn't actually articulate an indirect argument along these lines, he doesn't explicitly defend any of these assumptions. That said, Carl does pursue something in the ball-park of assumption 2, doubling-down on his assertion 'that the historicity of the resurrection accounts is undermined by passages in the Gospels and in Paul's epistles that . . . are clearly legends or fictionalizations'.⁷ Carl lists several passages that he thinks are 'clearly legends or fictionalizations':

I place in these categories the birth legends in Matthew and Luke (which contradict each other and are in conflict with known facts about the period); the opening of John, with its portrayal of Jesus' role in the creation about six thousand years ago; those passages in which the voice of God comes out of the sky (Matthew 3: 16–17 and many others) . . . conversations recorded verbatim and at length for which there were no plausible witnesses (Judas and the Temple priests in Matthew 27:3–6; the guards and the temple priests plotting false testimony in Matthew 28:12–13);

Pilate questioning Jesus in a private interview in John 18:28–38, despite our being told, 'It was now early morning, and the Jews themselves stayed outside the headquarters to avoid defilement, so that they could eat the Passover Meal' (18: 28).

However, even if Carl had a reliable principled method that allowed him to reliably detect 'legends or fictionalizations' within a text (which he doesn't), and even if that method supported his designation of all the passages he mentions as such, this still wouldn't negate the recognition of *specific* points of historical veracity gleaned from the NT via the historical criteria of authenticity. Nor would it undermine the inference from the enumeration of many specific examples of historical veracity in the NT to the *general* historical reliability thereof.⁸

Moreover, we must remember that NT scholarship recognizes a number of sources, written or otherwise, that stand behind the Gospels (for example, the 'Q' source thought to be common to Matthew and Luke). Even if it were shown that one or other of these sources is historically inaccurate, this wouldn't demonstrate that all of these sources are unreliable. In short, Carl's critique of the NT is *methodologically unsound on multiple grounds*.

As to Carl's examples:

- I refute Carl's unsupported assertions that the birth accounts in Matthew and Luke 'contradict each other' and 'are in conflict with known facts about the period.'⁹ (Even if these accounts did contradict each other *in every particular*, the possibility of one of the accounts being historically reliable would be left open. Again, even if both accounts were demonstrably 'in conflict with known facts about the

- period' to an extent that undermined belief in their general reliability, this would be compatible with making sound arguments for *specific* points of historical veracity either within the birth narratives or within other testimonial sources woven into these Gospels. In particular, since Matthew and Luke drew upon various sources, proving the birth narratives to be unreliable wouldn't justify the conclusion that the passion narrative sources are unreliable. Finally, criticism of the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke has no application to the Gospels of Mark or John, to relevant information from the creed quoted in 1 Corinthians 15, etc.)
- The preface to John's gospel offers a *theological* portrait of the divine *logos* having a role in creation before the incarnation, but it makes no claim about how long-ago this occurred. It certainly doesn't say that creation took place 'about six-thousand years ago' (relative either to the composition of John or to our own time). Although Carl should know from my biographical essay that I think young-earth creationism requires an implausible interpretation of the relevant biblical texts, he reads a young-earth creationist perspective into John's preface, without offering any hermeneutical justification for doing so.¹⁰
 - Carl's assertion that 'passages in which the voice of God comes out of the sky' are 'clearly legends or fictionalizations' rests upon his rejection of the supernatural, and is therefore question begging.
 - Carl's scepticism about the conversation between Judas and the Temple
- priests in Matthew 27:3–6 ignores relevant evidence that Craig drew to his attention during their debate:
- As for the exchange between Judas and the priests not involving Jesus at all (Matthew 27:3–10), here Acts 6:7 gives us an important clue. We read that 'a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.' If even just one of them had been among those who met with Judas, or had heard from their priestly friends about what transpired, they could easily have passed the word along to other Christians.¹¹
- Turning to Pilate's questioning of Jesus in John 18:28–38, Carl once again ignores evidence that Craig has already brought to his attention:
- First of all, it is highly unlikely that any Roman governor would ever be left alone with an accused criminal; other guards would have been present. We know that John had 'friends in high places' sufficient to gain entry to the high priest's courtyard (John 18:16); who knows what other acquaintances he might have had among the Roman guard? Craig Keener sees evidence here for actual legal proceedings, in which case at least one Roman official would have been assigned to Jesus as counsel. Records of proceedings would have been kept and could have been consulted. Moreover, the plausibility of the disciples hearing about this kind of conversation may be bound up with the plausibility of the resurrection itself. If Jesus did spend considerable time with his disciples over a forty-day period after the resurrection teaching them (Acts 1:3), then he would have had plenty of time to tell them all the details . . .¹²

More or Less Evidence Required?

Carl observes:

Peter writes, ‘In general, the more criteria of authenticity a saying or event passes, the more seriously we should take it.’ This seems reasonable to me. But I would like to suggest a corollary: The fewer and weaker the evidence for any alleged ‘fact,’ the weaker the case for accepting it. In this regard another general rule might be the greater the importance of an event involving the eternal fate of billions of people, the more compelling should be the evidence that this event actually happened.¹³

However, wouldn’t prudential rationality actually encourage us to act on the basis of *less* evidence in such cases, since a false negative carries greater risk than a false positive?¹⁴

An Alarming Absent Ascension?

Carl quotes neo-atheist physicist Victor J. Stenger back to me:

‘Absence of evidence is evidence of absence when the evidence should be there and is not.’ I agree. I’ve argued on this basis that the report of Jesus’ final words and his physical and visible ascension into heaven clearly meet this criteria [since] this event, alleged by the author of Acts, is nowhere confirmed or even hinted at by Paul or the authors of Mark, Matthew, or John, our only first-century sources for the stories of Jesus’ resurrection. These documents have not a hint that their authors have ever heard the story told by Luke of Jesus’ final words and ascension. Craig suggests that all the other first-century accounts do not mention Jesus’ last words and ascension because Luke has saved this for the ‘sequel’ to his Gospel, the Acts of the Apostles. This, however, fails to account for

the other Gospel accounts not completing the story with its natural climax. Peter also does not explain their silence.¹⁵

Carl’s argument from silence holds that the failure of any NT author to meet his literary expectations means they must have been making it all up (thereby making the false assumption that an argument from silence automatically trumps arguments from any and all other historical criteria). Nevertheless, the point stands that although Luke wrote about the ascension in Acts, *he clearly didn’t consider the ascension to be the ‘natural climax’ to his gospel, since he didn’t write about it there.* Rather, he thought of it as the natural introduction to the ‘Acts of the Spirit in the church of Christ’. As Craig said, Luke ‘understands it as the prelude to the sending of the Spirit at Pentecost (2:1–41).’¹⁶ If the other Gospel writers thought the same way, their failure to mention the ascension in their gospels is hardly surprising. As Craig observed:

The reason the ascension doesn’t appear in multiple writers may be as simple as observing that only one of the New Testament Gospel writers wrote a sequel. The four Gospels all end with the resurrection or with an announcement of it. The ascension came later.¹⁷

Indeed, Mark appears to have ended his gospel *without narrating any resurrection appearances*, although his narrative predicts at least one resurrection appearance and although we know that testimony about resurrection appearances was already circulating in creedal form well before Mark’s Gospel was published (see 1 Corinthians 15).

In any case, besides Luke’s report in Acts, Jesus’ ascension is *pre-figured or*

alluded to in several NT texts (including texts by John and Paul):

- John 20:17 (c.50-90 AD): ‘Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”’ (ESV)
- Ephesians 4:8 (c. 60-62 AD): ‘Therefore it says, “When he [Christ] ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.”’ (ESV)
- 1 Timothy 3:16 (c. 62 AD): ‘Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.’ (ESV)
- Hebrews 4:14 (c. 63-66 AD): ‘Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.’ (NIV)¹⁸

Hence, we actually have *early, independent testimony from multiple sources* (most likely four sources, if it is granted that Hebrews wasn’t written by Paul¹⁹) in *multiple forms* (biography and epistles), relating to Jesus’ ascension. Moreover, one of these testimonies comes from the apostle John, an *eyewitness*.²⁰

Contradictory Accounts?

Carl often asserts that there are contradictions within the NT, and he responds to my observation that his ‘critique of the canonical gospels often stems from an uncharitable and historically uninformed hermeneutic’²¹ by writing: ‘I’m sorry to be characterized as “uncharitable” in my analysis of the Gospel accounts, but I’m

unclear on what role charity should have in the understanding of these texts.’²² Given that Carl is an Emeritus Professor of English, I’m surprised by his self-professed ignorance of the principle of hermeneutical charity. Allow me to clarify by quoting our atheist co-contributor Richard Carrier, who makes the following plea in his book *Sense and Goodness Without God*:

I ask that my work be approached with the same intellectual charity you would expect from anyone else . . . ordinary language is necessarily ambiguous and open to many different interpretations. If what I say anywhere in this book appears to contradict, directly or indirectly, something else I say here, the principle of interpretive charity should be applied: assume you are misreading the meaning of what I said in each or either case. Whatever interpretation would eliminate the contradiction and produce agreement is probably correct.²³

As theologian Craig S. Keener observes:

Although harmonization is sometimes implausible, at other times it rightly values what survives of our sources above what we think we know based on our lack of surviving information. Thus, for example, scholars at one point noted two ‘contradictory’ oral accounts of an 1881 lynching: in one, the men hang ‘from a railroad crossing,’ in the other, they hang from a pine tree. Subsequently, however, historians found ‘old photographs that showed the bodies hanging at *different times from both places*’; after being lynched in one place, they were hanged again in another . . . it seems best methodologically to begin by seeking to explain our sources as they are.²⁴

As philosopher Lydia McGrew writes, literary ‘harmonization is not a desperate, specially religious activity used for preserving an *a priori* notion of inerrancy but rather is just good historical practice, applicable to *any* putatively historical accounts, not just to Scripture.’²⁵ Unfortunately, when Craig and myself offer what seem to us to be plausible harmonizations of the texts Carl asserts are contradictory, he fails to respond to our arguments. (Far worse than Carl’s lack of engagement, in an endorsement solicited by our publisher, Craig and I are accused by atheist Robert M. Price of ‘behaving like “eel wrigglers” (the Buddha’s term for wily and evasive opponents), retreating behind ingenious harmonization’s. Naturally: they are spin doctors for the dogma of an institution they serve.’²⁶ Talk about poisoning the well!²⁷

Carl persists in highlighting what he takes to be contradictions between the Gospels despite my explanation that the criteria of historical authenticity allow us to side-step questions like ‘Was Jesus’ first appearance to the male disciples in Jerusalem or Galilee?’, establishing *specific* data that can be shown to be historically likely and that therefore needs to be explained, quite apart from debates about the *general* reliability of the NT. As Terry L. Miethe and Gary R. Habermas emphasize in a passage I quoted in ‘EEE’:

Our arguments [for the resurrection are] based on a *limited number* of knowable historical facts and *verified by critical procedures*. Therefore, contemporary scholars should not spurn such evidence by referring to ‘discrepancies’ in the New Testament texts or to its general ‘unreliability’ . . . Jesus’ resurrection appearances can be historically demonstrated *based only on a limited amount of critically recognized historical facts*.²⁸

Carl ignores this key point and reiterates his objection:

In the Matthew account, Jesus at the tomb instructs his female disciples to tell his male disciples to ‘Go and take word to my brothers that they are to leave for Galilee. They will see me there.’ In the parallel passage in Luke’s Gospel, Jesus does not appear at the empty tomb . . .²⁹

Carl then explores Michael Licona’s recent suggestion, based upon his study of ancient compositional devices in biographical works, that Matthew re-locates Jesus’ resurrection appearance from Jerusalem to Galilee.³⁰ While I included Licona’s suggestion in a draft of ‘EEE’ that Carl saw, Carl knew I was withdrawing this material from the final version. I did this not only to reduce my word length, but because I’d decided *I didn’t agree with it*. I think Licona’s hypothesis is unnecessarily complex in this instance.

In point of fact, Matthew *doesn’t* report that Jesus appeared to the women at the empty tomb. Rather, Matthew states that ‘an angel of the Lord’ appeared at ‘the tomb’ (see Matthew 28:1-8) and said to the women:

Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold [i.e. take heed], he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you. (Matthew 28:5-7, ESV)

Theologian Ned B. Stonehouse comments that the present tense of the verb in Matthew 28:7:

may not be pressed . . . to mean that even at that moment Jesus was on the journey into Galilee, for this would bring Mt. 28:7 into conflict with 28:10 which locates Jesus still

in the vicinity of Jerusalem . . . Rather than being a progressive, therefore, the form in question must be understood as a vivid future, which is essentially the equivalent of the future in Mt. 26:32.³¹

Having reference several works on Greek grammar ‘on the use of the present [tense] for the future [tense]’,³² Stonehouse continues:

With regard to the words ‘there ye shall see him,’ it should be observed that they are so closely connected with the reference to Galilee that they serve to make explicit what has been constantly implied in the prophetic word of Jesus, namely, that Jesus would be waiting for them in Galilee and would welcome them there. They do not represent an independent disclosure by the angel as to when the disciples would first see the risen Christ but, taken in connection with the preceding clause, they serve to recall the substance of Jesus’ promise. Now that Jesus has risen from the dead, they may be assured that his declaration, that after his resurrection he would be in Galilee before they reached there, was about to be fulfilled.³³

According to Matthew, it was *after* ‘the women hurried away from the tomb’ (Matthew 28:8, ESV) that Jesus appeared to them, saying: ‘tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me’ (Matthew 28:10, ESV). This message, given by the angel and by Jesus, seems to have been designed to remind the disciples who’d accompanied Jesus to the Mount of Olives from the last supper of his words to them there: ‘after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee’ (Matthew 26:32, ESV. See Matthew 26:3-32 & Mark 14:26-28). Now, as Craig writes in his commentary on Matthew:

This does not preclude other earlier resurrection appearances, as described in Luke 24 and John 20, but does prepare the way for his appearance ‘up north’ following the end of the week-long festival of Unleavened Bread, when the Galilean pilgrims would return home. During this appearance, Jesus commissioned his disciples for their future ministry: herein lies Matthew’s particular interest.³⁴

That both messages about Galilee, from the angel and from Jesus, were intended for a group that extended beyond the core group of male disciples (known as ‘the twelve’, of which only eleven now remained), is indicated by the early creedal affirmation that after Jesus’ appearances ‘to Cephas and then to the Twelve’ he subsequently ‘appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.’ (1 Corinthians 15:5-6, ESV. See also: Matthew 28:16, Luke 8:3, 10:1 and 24:33-35 and Acts 1:21-26). This is plausibly the same meeting described in Matthew 28:16-20 as taking place in Galilee (though Matthew keeps his literary spotlight on the eleven disciples). As Stonehouse explains:

By the term ‘brethren’ as used in Mt. 28:10, it is by no means clear that only the eleven disciples are meant . . . In only two instances besides Mt. 28:10 does Jesus use the expression ‘my brethren,’ and both clearly describe in the broadest possible way those who were attached to him . . . Accordingly the command of 28:10 that his brethren should depart for Galilee would most naturally be understood as including all persons attached to his cause who were then in the vicinity of Jerusalem . . . a company of persons by no means restricted to the twelve.³⁵

Joseph Benson argued in the same vein:

*Go quickly, and tell his disciples . . . and assure them further, that he is going before them into Galilee; and that there they shall see him – In his appearance to them all together. But their gracious Lord would not be absent so long from the eleven and several others [e.g. those gathered indoors with the eleven apostles (see John 20:19 & Luke 24:9)]; he appeared to them several times before then . . . This message, as well as that from Jesus himself, Matthew 28:9-10, was sent to all the disciples [note the grouping called ‘the seventy-two’ (Luke 10:1) and the group of ‘about 120’ brethren (Acts 1:15)], and not to the apostles in particular. The reason may have been this: our Lord intending to visit his apostles that very evening, there was no occasion to order *them* into Galilee to see him. But as most of his disciples were now in Jerusalem, celebrating the Passover, it may easily be imagined, that on receiving the news of their Master’s resurrection, many of them would resolve to tarry in expectation of meeting with him; a thing which must have been very inconvenient for them at that time of the year, when the harvest was about to begin . . . Wherefore, to prevent their being so long from home, the message mentioned was sent, directing them to return into Galilee, well assured that they should have the pleasure of seeing their Lord there . . .*³⁶

Thus, we may agree with Stonehouse that:

Quite apart from the evidence of Luke and John, and judging Matthew’s testimony in the light of the structure of his resurrection narrative as a whole, as well as of the character of his gospel, the conclusion that he definitely excludes the possibility of a prior reunion with the eleven in Jerusalem seems

to us not to be well established.³⁷

Now, Luke reports Jesus instructing the disciples in Jerusalem to ‘wait here in this city until you are armed with power from above’; and this is indeed, as Carl observes, ‘a seeming reference to the day of Pentecost’. However, Carl mistakenly states that Pentecost is then ‘forty days in the future’. To substantiate his point, he quotes Acts 1:3-4: ‘To these men [the eleven apostles] he showed himself after his death . . . over a period of forty days . . . he directed them not to leave Jerusalem. ([Acts] 1:3–4)’.³⁸ However, note the temporal context provided by Acts 1:5, which Carl doesn’t quote:

And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, ‘you heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit *not many days from now.*’ (ESV, my italics)

So, while Carl places Jesus’ instruction to stay in Jerusalem ‘forty days’ before Pentecost, Luke places it ‘not many days’ before Pentecost, and thus towards the end of the ‘span of forty days’ during which the resurrected Jesus ‘appeared to them’. Nothing in Luke’s gospel contradicts this (see Luke 24:46-51).

Carl insists that the resurrection appearances in Luke’s gospel are presented as having all happened on Easter day in Jerusalem, a reading that not only uncharitably creates a contradiction with the other Gospels (since they indicate or narrate resurrection appearances in Galilee), but uncharitably creates a contradiction between Luke’s Gospel and Luke’s book of Acts, where we are given the time-frame of Jesus ‘appearing to them during forty days . . .’ (Acts 1:3, ESV).

Something that would only be apparent to someone who looked at the Greek of Luke's gospel is that the appearance narrative is stitched together using the Greek particle '*de*', which connects events as happening one after the other *without necessarily implying that they happened in immediate conjunction*. That is, '*de*' can be translated as 'moreover, on-top of this, then or next'.³⁹ Hence it's entirely possible that while the events of Luke 24:1-43 happened on Easter day, those of Luke 24:44 and following ('Then [*de*] he said to them . . .', ESV) happened days or weeks later. As Eric Lyons comments:

the Greek conjunctive particle *de* [translated 'and' (ASV), 'then' (NKJV), and 'now' (NASV)] [used] to begin verse 44, does not necessarily denote a close connection between the two verses, but only a general continuation of the account . . . Even though many twenty-first-century readers assume that the events recorded in Luke 24:44-49 occurred on the very day Jesus rose from the grave, the text actually is silent on the matter.⁴⁰

Indeed, the process of Jesus teaching the disciples about himself through the Old Testament scriptures (Luke 24:45-49) presumably took some time. Jesus' subsequent instruction to 'stay in the city [Jerusalem] until clothed with power from on high' (Luke 24:49) was given before he led them to the location of his ascension, on the Mount of Olives (about a thousand yards outside Jerusalem). Luke's gospel is *entirely consistent* with the information Luke adds in Acts 1:5 about the events of Luke 24:49 happening 'not many days' before Pentecost. In sum, Luke's accounts of the resurrection *complement* both each-another and the other gospels.

Evidence – Part Two: Data

Carl acknowledges as 'bedrock facts'⁴¹ that 'Jesus . . . was crucified by the Romans'⁴² and that 'after his death some of his disciples had experiences that convinced them that Jesus had been miraculously resurrected.'⁴³ Indeed, Carl recognizes not only that 'Jesus' disciples came to believe that Jesus had been miraculously resurrected from the dead,'⁴⁴ but also that (according to his opening case) 'some of Jesus' disciples thought they saw Jesus raised from the dead.'⁴⁵

In 'Miracle Not Required' Carl focuses on two points of evidential *disagreement*: the existence of Jesus' empty tomb and the purported appearance of the resurrected Jesus to Saul on the road to Damascus.

The Empty Tomb⁴⁶

Carl states that 'As evidence for the empty tomb, Peter cites the Jewish Tole-dot Yeshu.'⁴⁷ He reports that:

According to classical Judaism scholar Mika Ahuvia, 'Toledot Yeshu is a decidedly non-rabbinic counter-narrative and satire of the foundational story of Christianity, which likely originated in the late antique or early medieval period . . . in the genre of the folk story, no two manuscripts are identical and story-tellers likely embellished it with every recounting.' Peter's citing of this obscure and certainly unreliable document signals to me how thin and fraught with problems the actual evidence is.⁴⁸

Gary R. Habermas notes that although *Toledot Yeshu* wasn't compiled until the fifth century AD, 'it does reflect early Jewish tradition.'⁴⁹ As Mika Ahuvia says *in the article Carl quotes*:

Toledot Yeshu is a decidedly non-rabbinic counter-narrative and satire of the foundational story of Chris-

tianity, which likely originated in the late antique or early medieval period. It probably circulated orally for centuries before being transcribed in various places and times.⁵⁰

That said, I quoted from one of the later, and thus probably less reliable, ‘Group II traditions’ (traditions dominated by Queen Helene, Constantine the Great’s mother, anachronistically placed in the first century).⁵¹ However, *I didn’t quote Toledot Yeshu* ‘as evidence for the empty tomb’ as Carl says I did. Rather, in the process of arguing that while ‘The Jews believed in a general bodily resurrection at the end of time [they] did not have an expectation of an earlier, immediate, special resurrection for anyone’⁵², I quoted it to *corroborate the plausibility within a Jewish worldview of Matthew’s report concerning the Sanhedrin’s motive for posting a guard at Jesus’ tomb* (see Matthew 27:62-66). This is clear if my remarks about *Toledot Yeshu* are read in context:

If Jesus’ contemporaries made anything of his elliptical predictions about the Son of Man (i.e. himself) ‘rising’ . . . they’d have thought in terms of a) the resurrection of the dead *at the last judgement* (see Mark 12:25 & John 11:24), b) *revivification* to earthly life, as with Lazarus (though they’d probably assume a dead man couldn’t revive *himself*), or c) the story of Elijah. The dominance of these cultural assumptions is seen in the Sanhedrin’s reason for having Jesus’ tomb guarded: ‘lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, “He has risen from the dead”’ (Matthew 27:64, ESV). The Greek translated as ‘risen from the dead’ here isn’t *anastēsetai* (resurrected), but *ēgerthē* (raised up) . . . The Jewish *Toledot Yeshu* places this interpretation of events on the disciple’s

own lips: ‘On the first day of the week his bold followers came to Queen Helene with the report that he who was slain was truly the Messiah and that he was not in his grave; *he had ascended to heaven as he prophesied.*’ The Sanhedrin’s concern was probably ‘that the disciples would steal the body and claim it had ascended to heaven.’⁵³

In sum, Carl has simply misunderstood my use of *Toledot Yeshu*.

Carl thinks I make an inadequate case for the empty tomb:

About the alleged empty tomb, which is not clearly referenced until Mark’s Gospel written decades later, Peter writes that my questioning of the conclusions cited by a conservative Christian study group committed to a literalist interpretation of the Bible is an ad hominem argument, assuming that ‘scholars who believe in inerrancy can’t distinguish between what they believe on the basis of inerrancy and what they can demonstrate on the basis of historical scholarship.’ But this suggests that such believers are not subject, as we all are, to confirmation bias. I certainly do not mean to question the character of these scholars, but given that membership in this group might well be viewed as an honor, and a negative finding about the evidence for the empty tomb might lead members to feel they have to resign from the organization, a finding confirming historicity is hardly surprising. None of us achieve complete objectivity.⁵⁴

In reply, let me begin by mentioning two points in passing: First, that it was Craig who appealed to the conclusions of ‘a conservative Christian study group’ (The Gospels Research Project of Tyndale House, Cambridge). Second, that while Carl vaguely places Mark’s gospel ‘deca-

des' after Easter Sunday, the scholarly consensus holds that 'Mark was most likely written anywhere between ten to thirty years after Jesus' death'⁵⁵, and that I think the evidence suggests Mark was published c. AD 49.⁵⁶

More to the point, allow me to re-iterate a point made in 'EEE' with which Carl fails to engage: the empty tomb is accepted by a good many NT scholars *who cannot be accused of harbouring the sort of bias Stecher assumes*. As David Mishkin writes in his study of *Jewish Scholarship on the Resurrection of Jesus*:

Many non-Jewish scholars already have a faith commitment to Jesus. This does not mean that their scholarship should summarily be discarded as biased. It should be evaluated on its own merit. Nevertheless, the reality is that presuppositions are influential. Jewish scholars begin with a different set of presuppositions. But, what is interesting to note is that the main historical events that make up this discussion are virtually the same for both groups: crucifixion, burial, disciples' belief, empty tomb, and Paul's dramatic turnaround.⁵⁷

For example, noted Jewish NT scholar Geza Vermes argues that:

The evidence furnished by female witnesses had no standing in a male-dominated Jewish society . . . If the empty tomb story had been manufactured by the primitive Church to demonstrate the reality of the resurrection of Jesus, one would have expected a uniform and fool proof account attributed to patently reliable witnesses.⁵⁸

The empty tomb is verified by multiple criteria of authenticity, and that explains why it is accepted by many NT scholars *irrespective of their worldview*. As atheist historian Michael Grant concludes: 'The

historian cannot justifiably deny the empty tomb . . . the evidence necessitates the conclusion the tomb was found empty.'⁵⁹

If the existence of confirmation bias justifies Carl's rejection of expert opinion and argumentation, then, given that we are all subject to confirmation bias, such that 'none of us achieve complete objectivity', all that remains is silence. I might as well replace this paper with the observation that Carl undoubtedly suffers from confirmation bias, which means that his rejection of the resurrection 'is hardly surprising', and leave matters there.

Carl reckons that the 'most compelling argument against the empty tomb is the complete lack of evidence that Jesus' tomb ever became a holy shrine in the first century. Peter does not respond to this argument.'⁶⁰ Space limitations meant that I didn't respond to this point, so I'm glad to be able to respond here by noting that, while the site of Jesus' tomb was apparently *remembered* by the early church, the fact that no *veneration* appears to have taken place there supports the contention that the tomb was empty (i.e. that there was no body in the tomb to venerate).⁶¹ As J.P Moreland writes:

In Palestine during the days of Jesus, at least fifty tombs of prophets or other holy persons served as sites of religious worship and veneration. However, there is no good evidence that such a practice was ever associated with Jesus' tomb. Since this was customary, and since Jesus was a fitting object of veneration, why were such religious activities not conducted at his tomb? The most reasonable answer must be that Jesus' body was not in his tomb, and thus the tomb was not regarded as an appropriate site for such veneration.⁶²

Saul on the Road to Damascus

Carl responds to my defense of the resurrection appearance to Saul on the road to Damascus:

that Paul's anonymous companions 'knew something had happened' is hardly the equivalent of a shared group experience of Jesus. And do we really think that Paul's companions would have had a modern understanding of psychological experiences?⁶³

However, the distinction between a) an event that's experienced differently by various members of a group and b) one member of a group claiming an experience that, for all the other members of the group can tell, is purely subjective, is hardly restricted to 'a modern understanding of psychological experiences'! The road to Damascus event, as reported by Luke, falls into the former rather than the latter category. As Timothy Keller writes: 'Paul did not have simply a trance or a dream . . . since even the other men with Paul recognized the presence (Acts 9:7).'⁶⁴

Carl says that here I am 'forgetting or ignoring the dispute between Saul and Peter recorded in Galatians'⁶⁵, but this dispute is irrelevant because a) it happened *after* Saul converted, and b) it wasn't motivated by rivalry but by theology with which Peter was officially in agreement (see Acts 15:1—29 and especially 7-11).

Explanation

Carl suggests that there are:

'plausible natural explanations for the genesis [of the disciple's belief in his resurrection] – grief hallucinations, mistaken identity, dreams mistaken for reality, misheard or misinterpreted testimony, unconscious appropriation of another's experience, memory distortion, and disciple rivalry. No one of these

would likely be sufficient for the sincere belief of some of the disciples that Jesus had been resurrected. But . . . [t]hese quite natural, understandable beginnings could have easily led to a belief that Jesus had been miraculously resurrected, and to all the Gospel stories, with their fundamental contradictions and fictional and legendary embellishments. No miraculous resurrection required.⁶⁶

In 'EEE' I argued on the one hand that the resurrection hypothesis offers a relatively simple and wholly adequate explanation of the relevant historical evidence, an explanation that combines excellent explanatory scope and power with a fair degree of plausibility and low degrees of disconfirmation and *ad hoc*-ness (especially if one already accepts theism). On the other hand, I argued that Carl's explanatory factors not only 'have limited explanatory power [but] suffer from problems of disconfirmation, *ad hoc*-ness, and insufficient explanatory scope.'⁶⁷ While I noted that 'The most interesting hypothesis advanced by Carl is that a combination of psychological factors might explain the resurrection "appearances"'⁶⁸, I critiqued the explanatory adequacy of Carl's appeal to co-opted memories (whether sparked by mistaken identity, dreams mistaken for reality, etc.) and demonstrated that 'the appeal to co-opted memories can't eliminate the appeal to multiple hallucinations, including multiple group hallucinations.'⁶⁹ Indeed, while the appeal to hallucinations appears to be the skeptic's strongest card in attempting to explain away the putative resurrection appearances and the disciple's belief in Jesus' resurrection, given that the appeal to multiple hallucinations suffers from multiple short-comings, it seems to me that Carl fails to provide a better explanation of

the relevant evidence than is provided by the resurrection hypothesis.⁷⁰

Explaining the Empty Tomb

According to Carl:

Peter places considerable emphasis on the alleged empty tomb. For Christian scholars, the discovery of Jesus' empty tomb, which can only be explained by his having risen from the dead, is a major piece of evidence.⁷¹

However, I neither claimed nor think that the empty tomb 'can *only* be explained by [Jesus] having risen from the dead'. I do think that the need to explain the empty tomb puts additional strain on naturalistic alternatives to the resurrection hypothesis.

Carl complains that he referenced 'the many plausible arguments for natural explanations detailed in [Robert M.] Price and [Jeffery Jay] Lowder's [*The Empty Tomb*]: *Jesus Beyond the Grave*; Peter does not respond to any of these possibilities.⁷² Carl has me here.⁷³ In the interests of brevity, I focused upon arguing against Carl's denial of the empty tomb rather than upon the possible explanations he referenced for the empty tomb, preferring to critique Carl's naturalistic proposals for explaining the historical data that he did accept, namely, the appearance reports and the disciple's evident belief in Jesus' resurrection.

Explaining the Appearances

Responding to my review of evidence showing that false memories are co-opted by under half of subjects in studies of the phenomena, evidence that disconfirms the hypothesis that the disciple's claim about Jesus being resurrected was grounded in co-opted memories, Carl objects:

But I never made such a claim. I did argue that co-opted memories

might be one of many plausible explanations for the disciples' belief – in fact, I listed eight such natural explanations. I certainly do not believe that co-opted memories alone could account for the resurrection belief. But Peter has confirmed that this does happen, even if only for a minority of the population.⁷⁴

However, I critiqued each sub-hypothesis offered by Carl before addressing combined hypotheses. Besides, with a success rate of under half, any hypothesis that employs a more than *incidental* reliance upon co-opted memories in pursuit of explaining-away the disciple's reports and beliefs about the resurrection is going to be disconfirmed by the relevant clinical evidence.⁷⁵

Carl concedes:

I would have made a stronger case . . . if I had reversed Peter (the disciple) and Andrew in my speculation on how the resurrection belief might have begun – one of many ways – since so much more is known of Peter's life.⁷⁶

Note that here Carl presents an explanation that combines three elements (a dream, disciple rivalry and co-opted memory):

imagine that Peter reports a dream experience of the risen Jesus to the disciples. Andrew, arriving late, doesn't realize that Peter is relating a dream, and claims a similar encounter with the risen Jesus. This would be only human – and the Gospels make clear there was disciple rivalry. Several years later Andrew remembers the occasion very imperfectly: in his recollection, he had an encounter with the risen Lord – and it wasn't a dream!⁷⁷

Several years later? That's far too late! The disciples were preaching the resurrec-

tion in Jerusalem during Pentecost (see Acts 2:1-4:22) and the appearance traditions quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 were probably packaged in creedal form within months, or at most a few years, of the crucifixion.⁷⁸ So, Andrew lies, and then comes to believe his own lie years later, but the other disciples, including Peter, believe Andrew at the time?! But what about ‘doubting’ Thomas? What about Jesus’ brother James? What about the female disciples? What about Saul? How do we explain their belief? How do we explain Saul’s reported resurrection experience? Simply swapping Peter and Andrew around does Carl’s hypothesis no favors.

Expectation

Carl raises a number of issues in the areas of theology and philosophy of religion that limit his expectations of what any historical argument for the Christian revelation claim can demonstrate.

An Unreliable Prophet?

Carl protests:

in his discussion of Jesus as a prophet, Peter writes, ‘There’s every reason to think Jesus was an accurate prophet.’ But Peter has done nothing to refute the evidence to the contrary that I have already cited . . . For example, what of Jesus’ failure to return as promised within the generation of those living then? Consider Jesus’ words in Mark when challenged by the high priest: “‘Are you the Messiah, the Son of the blessed One?’ ‘I am,’ said Jesus, ‘and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Almighty and coming with the clouds of heaven’” (14:61–62). Clearly this is a claim by Jesus that his return will be witnessed by the priests interrogating him.⁷⁹

In point of fact, I dealt with Carl’s assertions about Jesus being a failed prophet at some length in ‘EEE’; but Carl dismisses my exegetical arguments and references because he’s content to rely upon his ‘literal’ reading of the texts he ‘cited’:

I am unable to see the connection between these passages and the events of 70 C.E. Note the similarities of these passages with passages that Peter does not quote, passages that make clear Jesus’ promise to return during the present generation. Jesus is responding to this question from his disciples: ‘Tell us, they said, ... what will be the sign of your coming and the end of the age?’ (Matthew 24:3).⁸⁰

Carl doesn’t make any exegetical arguments for his interpretation of the texts he ‘cited’. Nor does he engage with the exegetical arguments I made, or with the exegetes I quoted and referenced.⁸¹

Accessible Salvation

As noted in ‘EEE’: ‘According to Carl, believing in the resurrection means believing God excludes billions from salvation. Craig disagrees, as do I.’⁸² In the written debate, Craig said:

As for those who have never heard the gospel, it is sad that there are Christians who say that everyone who has never heard the gospel is damned or lost for all eternity. There are plenty of people in the Bible who never heard of Jesus who are called God’s people – many of them are Old Testament Jews, but some are Gentiles also who come to hear about the God of the Jews. May we not extrapolate from these examples and leave it in God’s hands to judge those who have never heard? Abraham asked God, ‘will not the Judge of all the earth do right?’ (Genesis 18:25) and the context suggests the answer is that he indeed will.⁸³

In 'EEE' I observed:

Peter affirms, 'The Lord is not willing that any should perish but [desires] that all should reach repentance' (2 Peter 3:9, NIV). John states, 'God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him' (John 3:17, NIV). Paul writes that God 'desires all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth' (1 Timothy 2:4, NIV). He also makes it clear that God doesn't condemn anyone for ignorance, but only for a culpable refusal to welcome 'the truth that would save them' (2 Thessalonians 2:9–10, ISV). Those who will 'come under judgment' are people 'who have refused to believe the truth and have taken pleasure in unrighteousness' (2 Thessalonians 2:12, Weymouth NT). If our understanding of the 'good news' contradicts these apostolic affirmations, our understanding must be improved!⁸⁴

Furthermore, whilst affirming that 'the fullest expression and experience of "the truth that would save" is found "in Christ" (see Acts 19:1–6; Romans 10:1–21; 2 Thessalonians 2:13)⁸⁵, I noted with Rev'd Nicky Gumbel that:

Abraham and David . . . were justified by faith. Jesus tells us in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector that the tax collector who said 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner,' went home justified before God (Luke 18:9–14).⁸⁶

I referenced scriptural warrant for my belief that: 'everyone saved by faith will ultimately receive salvation "in Christ" (see John 8:56; Acts 10:1–48; Romans 11:23–24; Hebrews 11:39–40).⁸⁷ I noted how 'This jives with the venerable theory that salvation is possible postmortem.⁸⁸ Finally, I noted that 'given divine

middle-knowledge, we may reckon that people who refuse salvation are people who would make the same choice in any possible world wherein it's feasible for God to create them.'⁸⁹

Unfortunately, Carl's 'Miracle Not Required' pays no attention to these remarks. Indeed, Carl ignores everything Craig and I say on this topic, failing to engage with either our positions or the arguments we give for them, even to the point of misrepresenting our beliefs:

if Peter and Craig are not mistaken, having the correct interpretation of this alleged event is determinative of whether upon dying one ascends to heaven to experience eternal joy with God, or whether one ceases to exist or descends to hell, there to spend all eternity because of a failure to believe in Jesus and his resurrection.⁹⁰

Rather, with theologians Clark H. Pinnock and Robert C. Brow, I affirm that:

Because God is love, we can be sure that no one will be excluded from knowing God by ignorance or lack of opportunity. Only those who deliberately reject God's love will be excluded, and they will really have excluded themselves. God has decided to exclude no one – exclusion can happen only as a result of the human decision to love darkness rather than light.⁹¹

Moreover, I lean towards the 'annihilationist' view that 'hell' and ceasing to exist are, at least in the long term, one and the same thing.⁹²

According to Carl:

[The] inability of Christians through the centuries to agree upon the true faith undermines the claims of contemporary Christians that salvation or damnation is consequent on correct belief in Jesus'

reported resurrection (or indeed anything Jesus taught).⁹³

Carl once again writes as if non-culpable failure to accept ‘correct belief’ is determinative of one’s destiny. While it’s obvious that Christians have many in-house disagreements (as do atheists!), I’d have thought it equally obvious that Christians share many theological agreements and that many of these agreements concern matters of central import. For all their diversity of theological interpretation and emphasis, different Christian communities and communions nevertheless find common-cause in the historic orthodoxy of creeds such as the Apostles’ creed and the Nicene creed.⁹⁴

Concerning salvation, what matters is faith *in* Jesus, that is, an active trust *in* Jesus and allegiance *to* Jesus as Lord and saviour. According to the 1999 ‘Joint Declaration on The Doctrine on Justification by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church’ (and although it was initially a Catholic-Lutheran agreement, this declaration has since been affirmed by the Methodist, Anglican and Reformed churches):

Together we confess [that] as sinners our new life [in Christ] is solely due to the forgiving and renewing mercy that God imparts as a gift and we receive in faith, and never can merit in any way . . . We confess together that sinners are justified by faith in the saving actions of God in Christ . . . Such a faith is active in love and thus the Christian cannot and should not remain without good works.⁹⁵

Discussing the reformation in his article on ‘Justification by Faith’, Catholic philosopher Peter Kreeft writes:

Luther discovered the simple bombshell truth that God had for-

given his sins freely . . . The watchword of the Reformation became Saint Paul’s summary of the gospel: ‘The just (justified, saved) shall live [have eternal life] by faith [in Christ]’ (Rom 1: 17) Where then do good works come in? In *Christian Liberty*, Luther explains that after the great liberation about faith – that we are saved by faith in Christ’s work, not by our works – comes a great liberation about works: they need not be done slavishly, to buy our way into heaven, to pile up merits or Brownie points with God, but can be done freely and spontaneously and naturally, out of gratitude to God – not to get to heaven but because heaven has already gotten to us. Thus they can be done for the sake of our neighbor, not for our own sake, to purchase salvation.⁹⁶

On Miracles and Evil⁹⁷

Carl’s expectations, which shape how he interacts with the historical argument for Jesus’ resurrection, are dominated by a rejection of miracles, a rejection that’s ultimately grounded in the problem of evil.

Carl affirms that since neither he nor any family member or friend has ever ‘heard the voice of God’ coming out of the sky, it would take confirmation ‘from a respected news source’ of ‘a voice from the sky that could only be the voice of God’ to get him to reconsider his worldview; although he would first ‘check the date to make sure it was not April 1st.’⁹⁸

On the one hand, Carl’s desire to avoid gullibility is both sensible and biblical (see 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21 & 1 John 4:1). On the other hand, the avoidance of gullibility shouldn’t drive us into the arms of cynicism. Why shouldn’t a voice that was simply *more likely than not* the voice of God be adequate to prompt Carl to

reconsider his worldview? Again, secular news sources probably share Carl's worldview, and are therefore unlikely to report anything that would force Carl to 'check the date' (unless *they* had confirmation from an equally respected and skeptical source, and so on *ad infinitum*). Indeed, Carl's discussion of evidential standards for belief in miracles has an air of artificiality about it that speaks of an underlying antipathy towards taking evidence for miracles seriously, for he contends that there is 'indisputable evidence'⁹⁹ against the possibility of miracles:

the greatest significance of this debate on Jesus' alleged resurrection is the place this event has in the closely related questions of God and his supposed plan for the world and for all who live in it. As conservative Christian scholars Gary Habermas and J.P. Moreland correctly note, 'Often a particular belief is part of a larger system of beliefs, and it gains rational support from its role in that system.' But I would suggest a corollary to this observation: 'When a particular belief is part of a system which lacks coherence or is contradicted by indisputable evidence, that belief lacks credibility.'¹⁰⁰

Carl asserts (he doesn't argue the point) that the existence of natural evil constitutes 'indisputable evidence' against an all-powerful and all-loving creator, before arguing (via his version of the corollary principle) that belief in Jesus' resurrection therefore 'lacks credibility'.

On the one hand, this argument pits Carl's professed openness to evidence against his professed worldview. On the other hand, strictly speaking, this argument is a *non-sequitur*, for it's *possible* for belief in the resurrection to fit within more than one 'system' of thought. For example, the Orthodox Jewish Rabbi and

theologian Pinchas Lapidé argues on historical grounds for the resurrection of Jesus¹⁰¹, yet he resists the inference to the truth of the Christian understanding of Jesus. In the face of evil, Rabbi Harold S. Kushner abandons belief in the omnipotence of God, yet without abandoning belief in monotheism *per se*.¹⁰² The combination of these two positions does an end-run around Carl's argument, showing that Carl's corollary principle is unsound because it's too strict. A better way to formulate Carl's corollary principle would surely be along the following lines:

- When a particular belief is a part of a larger system of beliefs, the denial of that belief gains support from arguments against that system *to a degree that depends upon a) the strength of the arguments against that system and b) how tightly the particular belief is tied to that system.*

Now, I'd happily agree with Carl that belief in the resurrection of Jesus is *most plausibly* associated with the Christian 'system', and that evidence for or against either one therefore translates into evidence for or against the other; but this is a matter of an inference that needs to be weighed in the balance rather than a deductive *fait accompli*.

Carl highlights Craig's suggestion that:

my own conclusions are based on something other than the merits of the case at hand: '... at the end of Carl's chapter he makes reference to the problem of evil. He did this briefly in the two live debates ... He has done so in email exchanges with me more recently. I suspect that this is the real nub of the problem. There can't be an all-powerful and all-loving God because of the amount of evil in the universe. If there is no God, then there are no miracles. If there are no miracles,

there is no resurrection. I suspect that for all of Carl's more sophisticated arguments this is really the reasoning that has led him to his conclusions. If this is the case, then the real issue to be debated is not the resurrection but the problem of evil . . .'¹⁰³

In reply, Carl writes:

My response is we live in a world that is beset by lethal natural disasters . . . termed 'Acts of God' by insurance companies. Given that we poor humans can do nothing to stop these forces of nature, but that an all-powerful God could do so without any effort, the label seems justified . . . Millions of Christians believe in a God who is supposedly everywhere, all-powerful, all-knowing, loving of all his children, morally perfect. I cannot share this belief.¹⁰⁴

Disappointingly, Carl fails to interact with any of the responses to the problem of evil made by either Craig or myself.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

Jesus' resurrection is a key piece of the Christian jigsaw. This key piece integrates with other pieces. The overall picture one thinks these pieces jointly form, one's assessment of that picture and of the many reasons for and against embracing it, will influence one's view of the matter at hand. That is, what one makes of the resurrection depends not only upon one's methodology in the gathering of the directly relevant historical evidence and upon how one assesses competing explanations for that evidence, but also upon an open and critical dialogue with one's philosophical expectations.

While Carl's desire to avoid gullibility is both sensible and biblical, it seems to me that his scepticism has been submer-

ged by a methodologically unsound cynicism. Indeed, Carl's methodology is fundamentally flawed:

- He mistakenly prioritizes *arguments from silence* over and against the standard criteria of historicity.
- He mistakenly makes arguments that are both *logically invalid* and *factually incorrect* against the *general* reliability of the Gospels as if they could vitiate any and all arguments for *specific* points of NT historicity.
- Despite his protests to the contrary, Carl's dismissal of work by scholars who believe in inerrancy is *ad hominem*.
- Ironically, given his remarks about literalism, Carl consistently assumes a *literalistic reading* of the texts he cites rather than a *literarily informed reading*. Indeed, Carl's reading of the NT is surprisingly *naive*, lacking in attention to literary genre, the meaning of key terms in the original language, etc. He rides roughshod over my exegesis of the biblical texts he cites, favouring historically un-contextualized and linguistically uninformed readings he apparently thinks so obvious that they can be defended without exegetical argumentation, simply by quoting an English translation.
- He repeatedly *ignores evidence* that has been brought to his attention in rebuttal of accusations he nevertheless persists in repeating.

As Craig concludes, Carl's sticking point isn't really the resurrection of Jesus, but 'the problem of suffering and evil in the world, and secondarily the question of the unevangelized, those who have never had a chance to hear the gospel.'¹⁰⁶ Indeed, Carl openly admits that his wil-

lingness to reconsider his atheism on the basis of evidential arguments for Jesus' resurrection is constrained by his 'impulse to assume that such events are either mistaken reports or they have a natural, non-miraculous explanation'.¹⁰⁷ As Carl rightly says: 'This takes us back to . . . our differing senses of reality.'¹⁰⁸

Postscript

As *Resurrection: Faith or Fact?* was being edited, Carl told his co-authors that he'd already outlived the expectations of his oncologists: 'So I've actually been very lucky; I just don't know how long this

will continue.'¹⁰⁹ After the original submission of this paper, I was saddened to see the announcement that: 'STECHER, Carl Age 78, passed away peacefully on November 24th [2019], in the care of family in his home in Georgetown, MA.'¹¹⁰

I wish to record my tribute to Carl as a generous friend and collaborator. As Carl's family wrote in his obituary: 'As a humanist and a skeptic, he often pondered the Big Questions, first and foremost what happens after we die. We love you Carl . . . and now that you have your answer, we hope that you are pleasantly surprised.'¹¹¹

Recommended Resources

(Audio) Peter S. Williams, 'Problems With The Problem Of Evil' (Trondheim University, 2018) http://peterswilliams.podbean.com/mf/feed/jpz78a/Trondheim_2018_Problems_With_Evil.mp3

(Audio) Peter S. Williams, 'The Particular and Exclusive Christ' http://peterswilliams.podbean.com/mf/feed/zr36r9/Exclusivism_2017.mp3

(Paper) Chris R. Brewin and Bernice Andrews, 'Creating Memories for False Autobiographical Events in Childhood: A Systematic Review', *Applied Cognitive Studies* (8 April, 2016) <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/acp.3220/full>

(Paper) Peter Kreeft, 'Justification by Faith' www.catholiceducation.org/en/religion-and-philosophy/apologetics/justification-by-faith.html

(Paper) Eric Lyons, 'To Galilee or Jerusalem?' (Apologetics Press, 2004) <http://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=6&article=730>

R.T. France, *Tyndale New Testament Commentary: Matthew* (IVP, 2008)

Robert A. Larmer, *The Legitimacy of Miracle* (Lexington, 2014)

John Sanders, *No Other Name: Can Only Christians Be Saved?* (SPCK, 1994)

Carl Stecher and Craig Blomberg, with contributions by Richard Carrier and Peter S. Williams, *Resurrection: Faith or Fact?* (Pitchstone, 2019)

Peter S. Williams, *Getting at Jesus: A Comprehensive Critique of Neo-Atheist Nonsense about the Jesus of History* (Wipf & Stock, 2019)

Peter S. Williams, *A Faithful Guide to Philosophy: A Christian Introduction to the Love of Wisdom* (Wipf & Stock, 2019)

Notes

1. My other contribution was one of the four biographical chapters that opened the book. Atheist Richard Carrier likewise contributed a biographical chapter and a chapter reviewing the debate between Carl and Craig, to which Craig responds in his closing remarks. As far as I'm aware, this is the only volume debating the resurrection that's published by a secular printing press.
2. Carl Stecher, 'The Historical Evidence Is Insufficient and Contradictory' in *Resurrection: Faith or Fact?* (Pitchstone, 2019).
3. See: Robert H. Stein, 'Criteria for the Gospel's Authenticity' in Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, ed.'s. *Contending with Christianity's Critics* (B&H Academic, 2009); Peter S. Williams, *Getting at Jesus: A Comprehensive Critique of Neo-Atheist Nonsense about the Jesus of History* (Wipf and Stock, 2019).
4. Stecher, op cit.
5. Carl Stecher, 'Miracle Not Required' in *Resurrection: Faith or Fact?* (Pitchstone, 2019).
6. See: Peter S. Williams, 'The Inspiration, Authority and Activity of the Bible' (2016) <http://podcast.peterswilliams.com/e/the-authority-inspiration-and-activity-of-the-bible/>.
7. Stecher, op cit.
8. See: Lydia McGrew, *Hidden In Plain View: Undesigned Coincidences in the Gospels and Acts* (DeWard, 2017); Peter J. Williams, *Can We Trust The Gospels?* (Crossway, 2018); Peter S. Williams, *Getting at Jesus: A Comprehensive Critique of Neo-Atheist Nonsense about the Jesus of History* (Wipf and Stock, 2019); Peter S. Williams, 'Digging for Evidence: Archaeology and the Historical Reliability of the New Testament' *Christian Evidence Society* (2016) http://christianevidence.org/docs/booklets/digging_for_evidence.pdf.
9. Stecher, op cit. See: YouTube Playlist, 'The Nativity' www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQhh3qcwVEWjXCwcSr2FYzpj5-uQrLKIR; Wayne Brindle, 'The Census And Quirinius: Luke 2:2' www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/27/27-1/27-1-pp043-052_JETS.pdf; Jonathan McLatchie, 'The Nativity Defended' <http://crossexamined.org/the-nativity-defended/>; J.C. Scott, 'Matthew's Intention to Write History' https://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bited_hildebrandt/ntsources/ntarticles/wtj-nt/scott-matthew-history-wtj.pdf; Brandon D. Crowe, *Was Jesus Really Born Of A Virgin?* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Westminster Seminary, 2013); Douglas Edwards, *The Virgin Birth In History And Faith* (London: Faber & Faber, 1943); J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (London: James Clark & Co. Ltd., 1958); Colin R. Nicholl, *The Great Christ Comet: Revealing The True Star Of Bethlehem* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2015); Charles L. Quarles, *Midrash Criticism: Introduction and Appraisal* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1998); John Redford, *Born Of A Virgin: Proving the Miracle from the Gospels* (London: St Pauls, 2007); Peter S. Williams, 'The Nativity' http://peterswilliams.podbean.com/mf/feed/rh7ek3/rt_nativity.mp3.
10. See: YouTube Playlist, 'Young Earth Creationism' www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQhh3qcwVEWitFuSuMLz5fmhRGBHR8-_O; Paul Marston, 'Understanding the Biblical Creation Passages' [www.asa3.org/ASA/topics/Bible Science/understanding_the_biblical_creation_passages.pdf](http://www.asa3.org/ASA/topics/Bible%20Science/understanding_the_biblical_creation_passages.pdf); Gavin Ortlund, 'Did Augustine Read Genesis 1 Literally?' <http://henrycenter.tiu.edu/2017/09/did-augustine-read-genesis-1-literally/>; J. Daryl Charles, *Reading Genesis 1-2: An Evangelical Conversation* (Hendrickson, 2013); John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One* (IVP Academic, 2009); Peter S. Williams, 'Mythology' in Paul Copan et al, ed.'s. *Dictionary of Christianity and Science* (Zondervan, 2017).
11. Craig L. Blomberg, 'Part Two: The Case Against Jesus' Resurrection as a Fact of History'.
12. Stecher, op cit.
13. Ibid.
14. Consider William James' famous pragmatic argument in 'The will to believe'. See my discussion of James' argument in the final chapter of Peter S. Williams, *The Case for God* (Monarch, 1999).
15. Williams, quoted by Stecher, 'Miracle Not Required', op cit.
16. Craig L. Blomberg, 'A Reply to Carl'.
17. Ibid.
18. On Hebrews 4:14, see F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Eerdmans, 1990), 115.
19. See: F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Eerdmans, 1990), Zondervan Academic Blog, 'Who wrote the book of Hebrews?' <https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/who-wrote-the-book-of-hebrews/>; Kyle Campbell, 'The Authorship of Hebrews' www.truthmagazine.com/archives/volume40/GOT040175.html.
20. For a defence of John's role in the testimony of the fourth gospel, see: Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel* (Apollos, 2001); Peter S. Williams, *Getting at Jesus: A Comprehensive Critique of Neo-Atheist Nonsense about the Jesus of History* (Wipf and Stock, 2019).
21. Williams, 'EEE'.
22. Stecher, op cit.
23. Richard Carrier, *Sense and Goodness Without God: A Defence of Metaphysical Naturalism* (AuthorHouse, 2005), 5-6.
24. Craig S. Keener, *Christobiography: Memory, History, and the Reliability of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2019), 315.

25. Lydia McGrew, 'Licona Wrap-Up' http://whatswrongwiththeworld.net/2017/12/licona_wrapup.html.
26. Robert M. Price, endorsement for *Resurrection: Faith or Fact?: A Scholars' Debate Between a Skeptic and a Christian* (Pickwick, 2019), www.amazon.co.uk/Resurrection-Blomberg-Richard-Carrier-Williams/dp/1634311744/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?_encoding=UTF8&qid=1568539845&sr=8-1.
27. See: 'Poisoning the Well' www.logicallyfallacious.com/tools/lp/Bo/LogicalFallacies/140/Poisoning-the-Well
28. Terry L. Miethe and Gary R. Habermas, *Why Believe? God Exists!* (Joplin, MO; College Press, 1998), 273–4.
29. Stecher, op cit.
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